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SUBJECT: DARFUR - HUMANITARIAN ACCESS DOWN BY 40 PERCENT IN SOUTH  
DARFUR

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SUMMARY  
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(U) According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), aid agencies now have 40 percent less access to conflict-affected populations, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), in South Darfur than they had one year ago. Relief agencies consistently cite limited humanitarian access as one of the major obstacles in Darfur. Insecurity, direct targeting of humanitarian agencies, and administrative delays hinder daily operations for non-governmental organization (NGO) working in Darfur. In meetings with USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) Director Ky Luu, OCHA stated that humanitarian agencies access to affected populations in Darfur decreases by one area per week and expect that this will very quickly begin to impact the health and nutritional status of affected populations in the coming months. Regaining humanitarian space largely hinges on a successful political solution to the Darfur conflict, according to the humanitarian actors that the USAID/OFDA Director met with in the state capitals. End Summary.

¶1. (U) In all three Darfur states, an estimated 900,000 people out of a total affected population of 3.8 million people currently can not be accessed by aid agencies. The inaccessible populations live in rural areas outside of towns or IDP settlements with helicopter landing sites. USAID/OFDA is concerned that the humanitarian community is losing ground and increasingly unable to provide life-saving services to hundreds of thousands of IDPs. If the populations can not access water or health services they may begin to migrate to other areas, which would further complicate the displacement situation and increase demands on aid agencies. The rainy season is expected to begin in May, which has historically decreased fighting and insecurity in Darfur. However, the rains also render roads impassible, which will further limit access to rural populations.

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NORTH DARFUR  
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¶2. (U) In North Darfur, humanitarian access is limited by banditry, insecurity, fighting, and occasional Sudanese government bombings in rural areas. The International Rescue Committee told the USAID/OFDA

Director that over the last nine months it had been unable to access beneficiaries living along the El Fasher-Kutum road. While agencies are able to fly to Kutum town, providing services outside of town has been severely limited. The same holds true for most of North Darfur's other towns, with the town being accessible and the rural areas unreachable.

13. (U) On April 23, staff from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) briefed the USAID/OFDA Director on population movements in North Darfur. IOM reported that unconfirmed displaced populations have returned to Dar Zagawa area near Umm Baru, Kutum locality. According to IOM, as camps become more insecure, populations are beginning to return to Dar Zagawa. IOM stated that it is a major protection concern to have an unmonitored population shifting north to Dar Zagawa area in the dry season. IOM also stated that the OCHA displacement figures are often inaccurate as they rely on estimates provided by community leaders and are not verified through standardized assessment procedures. Both OCHA and IOM reported that providing assistance in the Kutum locality needs to be approached cautiously in order to avoid creating a pull factor for the 90,000 Sudanese refugees living in Chad, just across the border. USAID/OFDA is concerned that the current movements of displaced populations are unmonitored and that insecurity may prevent the humanitarian community from providing services to the displaced populations.

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WEST DARFUR  
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14. (U) On April 24, the UN Country Team in El Geneina briefed the USAID/OFDA Director on the current humanitarian situation. The UN staff stated that the humanitarian community has nearly "lost its grip" on the humanitarian situation in the rural areas and that relief operations are concentrated in the 15 to 20 helicopter-accessible locations. In West Darfur, there are approximately 50 IDP settlements, although the number of settlements is currently expanding and the new areas require additional

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assistance. In addition, the UN team commented that humanitarian assistance has adapted to the chronic insecurity by conducting "hit and run" operations. Although less than ideal, these operations have been able to stabilize a good portion of the population and continue to provide assistance to 800,000 people out of a total population of 1.8 million in West Darfur. The Kulbus corridor has been particularly volatile. Since July 2006, relief agencies have been relocated from Kulbus area three times.

15. (U) The situation in Zalingei and Jebel Marra localities differs from the western part of West Darfur significantly. In Jebel Marra, humanitarian access is limited by ongoing fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan Liberation Army faction led by Abdul Wahid (SLA/Wahid), according to OCHA.

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SOUTH DARFUR  
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16. (U) According to the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) staff in Nyala, South Darfur is affected less by aerial bombing and fighting between SAF and opposition groups than the other states. However, South Darfur is most affected by interethnic fighting and has recorded the highest number of newly displaced people since January. In Kass and Buram localities, interethnic fighting has displaced thousands of people since December 2006. In March, aid agencies were able to access populations in Kass on a limited basis. In Buram, access to the populations has been more or less cut-off for more than six months, many of the people from Buram are arriving in Nyala-area IDP camps such as Otash. OCHA described the humanitarian impact of restricted access, conflict, and insecurity as causing displacement and dispersment into rural areas, where aid agencies can not reach the populations. In addition, OCHA cautioned that while private contractors may be able to deliver aid, the contractors will have to pay protection money, which will fuel insecurity.

¶7. (U) The impact of the January 19 incident in Nyala, when 20 aid workers were attacked and arrested at a social gathering, has also reduced humanitarian space. The incident has impacted staff morale, security, and the organizations' operations. Aid workers are increasingly violently targeted, impacting relief programs, particularly in South Darfur.

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COMMENTS  
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¶8. (U) While humanitarian access has been a major concern since May 2006, USAID/OFDA sees this trend as especially concerning. As access continues to decline, needs are increasing. Since January, OCHA has reported more than 100,000 newly displaced people in Darfur, many of whom require food, relief commodities, and shelter materials. Those that arrive in camps or organized IDP settlements will receive services, but those that are dispersed into rural areas will not receive immediate assistance. USAID/OFDA staff will coordinate with NGO and UN partners to monitor the situation and ensure that as much of the conflict-affected population receives assistance. However, a political solution leading to a more stable security situation in Darfur is critical to preventing a further deterioration of humanitarian space.

POWERS